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# THE MEXICAN AMERICAN

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A Paper Prepared for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights — 1968

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# INTRODUCTION

Mexican Americans are the second largest minority in the United States, numbering at least five million. Of these, almost 90 percent live in the five Southwestern States: Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. As of 1960, Mexican Americans constituted 11.8 percent of the total population of the Southwest.*

## Heterogeneous Group

Mexican Americans constitute a distinctive but highly heterogeneous group which is one of the oldest in the country, yet is steadily augmented by a stream of new immigrants from Mexico. The community has been subject to massive dislocation and change owing to the impact of technology and a changing economy, yet it has clung with remarkable tenacity to its traditional language and culture. If anything, the sense of

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* The breakdown for each State was as follows: Arizona, 14.9 percent; California, 9.1 percent; Colorado, 9 percent; New Mexico, 28.3 percent; Texas, 14.8 percent. Neither the overall figure as percentage of population nor the breakdown for the States probably is accurate as of 1968, since the Mexican American birth rate is higher than that of the general population, and the trend in population movement has been toward California. In the decade between 1950 and 1960, California's Spanish-speaking population increased by 87 percent, while the total population of the State increased by only 44 percent.

a common identity is probably stronger now than it ever was, in spite of the general tendency of the dominant society to ignore or suppress it and in spite of (or because of) many years of overt and covert discrimination.

The high drama and nationwide visibility of the civil rights movement have tended to obscure the more localized protests of Mexican American groups and the demands of their spokesmen that Mexican Americans achieve the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship and be enabled to participate fully in American economic, political, and social life. The protests have been steadily growing in numbers and strength, however, and they bespeak an increasing solidarity and militancy within the community. During early 1968, to cite only three examples, Mexican American students boycotted several Los Angeles high schools (and enlisted significant parental and community support); leaders of the Mexican American community in California affirmed their support of land claims made by Spanish-speaking residents of New Mexico; and Mexican American students at colleges and universities all over the Southwest started efforts to organize. An effort to increase cooperation with other groups was signified by Mexican American participation, along with Anglos, Negroes, and American Indians, in the "Poor People's March" on Washington. Community spokesmen had joined in planning the

demonstration at the invitation of the late Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Growing Frustration

The enactment of various items of civil rights legislation at the Federal and State levels and the introduction of new programs designed to reduce poverty and inequality have been accompanied by growing frustration on the part of many Mexican Americans, who can perceive little or no improvement in the general status of the community. A survey conducted in 1964 among unemployed Mexican Americans in Los Angeles revealed that close to 90 percent "had noticed no results whatsoever from civil rights or Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) legislation anywhere." This is understandable: a special census of East Los Angeles, which is about 75.6 percent Mexican American, showed that between 1960 and 1965 real income in the area dropped, home ownership declined, and housing deteriorated.

Throughout the Southwest as a whole, more than a third of all Mexican American families live in "official" poverty, on incomes of less than $3,000 per year. A Mexican American is seven times more likely than an Anglo to live in substandard housing. The chance that his baby will be born dead or will die before his first birthday is about twice as great. Mexican Americans, on the average, achieve several fewer years of education than either the Anglo or nonwhite populations

of the Southwest. Their unemployment rate is about twice that of Anglos. Of those who are employed, the vast majority--almost 80 percent--work at unskilled or low-skilled, low-paying jobs.

The spiral of Mexican American poverty is similar in rough outline to that of all other poverty in the United States. So are many of the causes. The "Mexican American problem," then, is simply an American problem. But while it is misleading and dangerous to exaggerate the "uniqueness" of any group, particularly one as heterogeneous as the Mexican American, there are certain characteristics of the community in general and of its experience in this country which are truly unique. Lack of Anglo understanding and of attention to these characteristics has been extensive, not only at the national level, where it is virtually complete, but in the Southwest itself. The result is that, although all minority groups are the victims of misunderstanding and stereotyping, Mexican Americans appear to be particularly subject to such stereotyping. To take a simple but profoundly important misconception: many, probably most, Anglos still think of Mexican Americans as being primarily engaged in farm labor. The truth is that the group is heavily urbanized, a strikingly significant feature of a community with low educational and occupational skills and with the youngest population and highest birth rate in the country. Policies

which fail to take account of these and numerous other characteristics are doomed to failure.

### Lack of Hard Data

Apart from census and other statistics which reveal the stark outlines of Mexican American poverty and other disabilities, there is an astonishing lack of "hard data" and research which firmly establish the reasons. School segregation, for example, is believed by Mexican American and Anglo observers to be severe, yet figures exist only for the State of California. Health statistics are almost impossible to come by. Although numerous allegations have been made in the past and continue to be made about denials of civil and constitutional rights, few cases have been brought to the courts to be proved or disproved. And although much has been written about the condition of farm and migrant workers, little serious study has been made of life in the crowded barrios* where 80 percent of the Mexican Americans live.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is conducting studies of the extent and degree of denial of equal protection of the law to Mexican Americans in the areas of education, economic security, and the administration of justice in the

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* Barrio, Spanish for neighborhood, means in the U.S., a predominantly Spanish-speaking section of a town or city.

Southwestern States. A part of the Commission's study was a public hearing in San Antonio, Texas, December 9-14, 1968, to collect information concerning civil rights problems of Mexican Americans in those States. Reports of the Commission's studies will be published at various times during 1969 and will contain recommendations to the President and the Congress for corrective action.

In this paper, the term "Mexican American" is used to describe the Spanish-surnamed population of the Southwestern United States. Members of the group are also known, in various places, by such terms as Spanish American, Spanish-speaking, Hispano, Latin American. The inaccuracy of all of these terms to describe individual members of the group is obvious: an individual may speak English as well as Spanish, or not have a typically Spanish surname, or his ancestors may have lived in the territory comprising the Southwestern States for centuries with no contact with Mexico, or he may be almost completely of Indian rather than of Spanish descent. Mexican American is used here because it is roughly descriptive, since most Americans of Spanish surname in the Southwest are of Mexican descent or birth, and because it differentiates between them and other Spanish-surnamed populations such as Puerto Ricans.

The word "Anglo" is used in this paper as it is used in the Southwestern States--to designate the non-Mexican American

group of persons whose native language is English. "Nonwhites" include American Indians, Negroes, and Oriental Americans.

**Staff Paper**

This paper was prepared for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights by Helen Rowan, a writer with experience in investigating the problems of Mexican Americans. The paper does not purport to be a comprehensive study of Mexican American life in the United States. Rather, its purpose is to indicate the type and range of problems facing the Mexican American community and to suggest ways in which some of these problems are peculiar to the community or have distinctive features with respect to it. Specific examples or incidents are cited, not to imply that the particular condition prevails everywhere to the same degree, but as illustrative of major problems and of the kinds of experiences which many Mexican Americans have undergone personally or believe their fellows to have undergone.

## MEXICAN AMERICANS IN THE SOUTHWEST

Spanish-speaking persons have been in what is now New Mexico since 1590, and had settled communities over much of what is now the American Southwest by the middle of the nineteenth century. The land was ruled by Spain until Mexico achieved independence in 1821. But by 1853, the United States had acquired, by purchases and by force--primarily the latter--nearly one million square miles of Mexican territory, or half of all Mexico.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 ended the Mexican-American War. In establishing the rights of Mexicans in territories ceded to the United States, the Treaty stipulated that "...property of every kind, now belonging to Mexicans not established there, shall be inviolably respected. The present owners, the heirs of these, and all Mexicans who may hereafter acquire said property by contract, shall enjoy with respect to it guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to citizens of the United States." The Treaty contained no language that guaranteed language and cultural rights. Mexican Americans assert that since then the land grants made by and protected in the Treaty have been largely usurped from the families and pueblos which held them, and that the rights guaranteed by the Treaty have been consistently violated.

In 1967, the Mexican American associate director of a State migrant council described the status and experience of the resident Mexicans who in 1853 became American at the stroke of a pen:

> They had all the disadvantages of a vanquished nation, but none of the advantages of a Marshall Plan, or even the understanding that there are differences in cultural groups. They were now subject to impositions of a new and powerful nation whose cultural orientation and social and legal systems were diametrically opposed to theirs. The new government proceeded to exploit what was beneficial to it, and ignore what was not. A new language was introduced, but little effort was made to provide instruction in it. Then the new economy which was superimposed was different, but no effort was made to educate people to relate to it. Taxes were imposed on the land; it became a commodity rather than a meaningful possession. Gradually it was lost.

By the turn of the century, most of the States had already enacted language laws which inhibited Mexican American participation in voting and judicial processes and in the schools. Segregation, either by school or classroom, was widespread. Some parts of Texas even maintained three separate systems: for Anglos, Mexican Americans, and Negroes. There were many incidents of violence against Mexican Americans and Mexican citizens in the United States. By 1922, they had become so severe that the Secretary of State warned the Governor of Texas that action would have to be taken to protect Mexicans.

However bad conditions and wages may have been on this side of the border, they obviously appeared better than those in Mexico to the millions of Mexicans who entered the United States over the years, some temporarily, many to stay. The succeeding and fluctuating waves of immigration have reflected economic and political conditions in Mexico as well as opportunities for work in the United States: first in the mines and on the railroads, then in agriculture, more lately industry. And over recent years, first because of displacement caused by the bracero program and more recently as machines have increasingly taken over the cultivating and harvesting of the fields and vineyards, Mexican Americans, along with many other Americans, engaged in the great internal migration to the towns and cities.

"If we speak of the East Los Angeles area as being a port of entry, people immediately associate it with the port of entry for people from a foreign country," a Mexican American said recently. "I speak of a port of entry to the thousands of our people that are moving to the area from the Valley, where 135,000 farms ten years ago have been reduced to approximately 80,000, highly mechanized. And here are the people who lack the basic language skills and trade skills that are moving into the urban areas, looking for an opportunity. It is the poverty of opportunity that we must overcome."

The Mexican American barrios and colonias tabulate the familiar statistics of the urban poor: relatively high delinquency and social dependence, educational deprivation, disintegrating family life, and, of course, unemployment. But the urban barrio--indeed, the entire Mexican American community in the Southwest--is subject to an additional set of economic and social pressures. Immigrants from Mexico--about 40,000 a year--bring with them the same kinds of social handicaps as do the new arrivals from the American rural areas. They represent direct competition for the few available jobs (and are particularly susceptible to exploitation in sweatshops), they place added pressure on schools and health and welfare agencies, and they add to the burden of the existing Mexican American community which must both absorb them and act as interpreters and mediators between them and the unfamiliar, complex, and impersonal Anglo world. Between 1960 and 1964, nearly 218,000 Mexican immigrants arrived, of whom more than 78 percent were either unskilled or of low skills; only 30 percent of all immigrants of the United States during that period fell into that category.

The Mexican American birth rate is extraordinarily high, considerably greater than that of any other single group in the country, about 50 percent greater than that of the population as a whole. The population is unusually

young, with a median age 11 years below Anglo. Almost 42 percent of Mexican Americans are under the age of 15, compared with 29.7 of Anglos and 36.6 of nonwhites. Families tend to be large; the proportion of families of six persons or more is about three times that of Anglos.

The large-family, low-income pattern makes housing a particular problem for Mexican Americans, with families often forced to choose between adequate space in dilapidated housing or very crowded space in more desirable dwellings. Frequently, housing is both crowded and dilapidated.

Residential segregation is widespread, although there are large variations in its extent from place to place. The barrios tend not to be "central city" concentrations, however, as are the newer Negro ghettos. Rather, the old colonias which often ringed the Southwestern towns and cities were engulfed as the towns grew. The result is that in many places there are several concentrations of Mexican Americans rather than just one, which means, of course, that Mexican American "target areas" for social agencies are dispersed.

Health statistics for Mexican Americans across the Southwest are not available because the government agencies which collect them break them down into white and nonwhite categories only; hence Mexican Americans cannot be distinguished from the rest of the white population. What little

information is available, however, notably for the State of Colorado and the city of San Antonio, indicate that, as would be expected, a larger proportion of Mexican Americans than of the general population, die from causes which are usually associated with low socioeconomic conditions. And in Colorado, at least, there is a marked difference in longevity, with the mean age at death of Spanish-surnamed persons being 56.7 years in contrast to 67.5 years for others.

A recent report by two members of the School of Public Health at the University of California at Los Angeles noted that there is "a complete lack of data on the health services available to Mexican Americans and the degree to which these services are utilized by members of the group."

Although more than 85 percent of the Mexican American population is native born, political participation is relatively low, and Mexican Americans have few elected representatives in Congress and, except for New Mexico, only a handful in the State legislatures, with none at all in California. Mexican American organizations totally lack the funds and resources necessary to mount effective voter registration drives, and neither political party has shown much inclination to provide them.

Mexican American political strength is potentially large, but it is still largely potential. The numerous Mexican American organizations therefore carry most of the

burden of pressing community interests, but these organizations have very little money, usually no paid staff, few research facilities, and limited opportunities for the leaders even to meet together. There is no Mexican American organization equivalent of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) or the National Urban League; no Mexican American colleges; and virtually no financial or other help from outside the community itself. It has thus been extremely difficult for the leadership to develop and pursue strategies which would force public agencies and institutions to pay greater and more intelligent attention to Mexican American needs and to make changes, where necessary, to meet them.

## CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Many Mexican Americans have suffered violations of their constitutional rights, and they have not had full or ready access to all of the processes involved in the administration of justice. Often they are denied such access; often it appears that they fail to seek it.

Preliminary investigations by staff members of this Commission, and a survey conducted independently by a team from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc., lead to the belief that denials of civil rights which have been documented are repeated elsewhere, undocumented; many violations have doubtless been suffered in silence, or where they have been protested have not been proved. The Commission on Civil Rights has begun an investigation into the administration of justice throughout the Southwest.

Three recurring complaints are made with special frequency by Mexican Americans: of police brutality, illegal arrest, and exclusion from juries.

Allegations of the use of unnecessary force on the part of law enforcement officers have been made in many towns in all the Southwestern States, and every Mexican American attorney interviewed by the NAACP team cited police brutality as a major issue in his area. Mexican American youths have died while in police custody in

California, Colorado, and Texas. In 1966, the Council on Mexican American Affairs took testimony in nearly 30 cases of alleged brutality in the Los Angeles area alone and demanded Federal investigation of the findings.

In 1967, the Texas Advisory Committee to the Commission on Civil Rights, having heard testimony concerning a farm labor dispute in Starr County, Texas, concluded that excessive force was used by local police and Texas Rangers against striking Mexican American workers, and that there were other infringements of their civil rights. The Advisory Committee asked that the Department of Justice investigate the case. A Senate investigating subcommittee also concluded that excessive force had been used. The National Council of Churches and the AFL-CIO have supported lawsuits to enjoin the Rangers from interfering with the strikers. The Rangers are regarded with great resentment and distrust by many Mexican Americans. One said to the Committee: "There's a lot to the saying that you hear in South Texas that all of the Rangers have Mexican blood. They have it on their boots."

Mexican Americans in Los Angeles complain that the police use "dragnet" arrest techniques, taking into custody everyone at or near the scene of a crime. Allegations of other forms of illegal arrest--such as entering houses late at night and making arrests, without warrants, for petty offenses--are made in other parts of the Southwest. Recent cases in

Northern New Mexico have aroused particularly widespread resentment among Mexican Americans throughout the Southwest. In June of 1967, an organization formed to press Mexican American claims to ancestral and land grants had scheduled a rally to be held in the countryside. The district attorney of Rio Arriba County warned leaders that the meeting would not be tolerated; as Mexican Americans arrived he arrested them on a variety of minor charges, including mistreatment of animals, and held them incommunicado for several days before dismissing the charges. In reprisal, a group of Mexican Americans attempted a citizen's arrest of the district attorney at the Rio Arriba County Courthouse in Tierra Amarilla. In the ensuing melee the attackers wounded two officers. Following this episode, 50 Mexican Americans, including women and children, were held in an open sheep pen for 36 hours, with no charges brought against them then or later.

More subtle, but undoubtedly much more widespread, than physical brutality is what Mexican Americans regard as psychological brutality on the part of many police officers. As the background report of the President's Crime Commission noted, there is the feeling that police are discriminatory, condescending, and paternalistic; that there is excessive patroling in Mexican American districts, frisking of adults and youths; and the use of degrading or

condescending terms such as "pancho," "muchacho," and "amigo" in addressing Mexican Americans.

It appears that a major element in the friction between police and the Mexican American community is the relative dearth of policemen of Mexican descent. A Mexican American alleged in 1966 that the Oakland, California, police force of 617 included only five of Spanish surname, two of whom spoke Spanish. There are cities in Colorado with Mexican American populations exceeding 20 percent in which there are no Spanish-speaking policemen.

### Mexican Americans and the Border Patrol

Many Mexican Americans have a sense of special grievance against the Border Patrol of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, a unit of the U.S. Department of Justice. Officers of the Border Patrol are authorized to interrogate, without a warrant, any person believed to be an alien on his right to be or to remain in the United States, and to search conveyances, such as buses or railway cars, within 100 miles of the border. The result is that many U.S. citizens of Mexican descent are accosted and questioned in what they often term as harassment. They point out that no other American citizens, as a group, are subject to such trouble and humiliation.

It appears that an important cause of intense Mexican American resentment against the Border Patrol is the widespread belief that its fluctuating activities reflect the wishes of powerful agricultural interests in the Southwest. They cite the fact that before the mid-1950's, millions of Mexican "wetbacks" managed to enter the U.S. illegally to provide a supply of cheap agricultural labor despite the Patrol. Yet after the initiation of the bracero program in 1951, which provided for Mexican nationals to work on contract under government supervision, the Border Patrol suddenly and unaccountably became more efficient. Within five years, it rounded up and deported nearly four million wetbacks, more than a million in 1954 alone. In 1967, a Mexican American economist told the Commission on Civil Rights: "American immigration policy is a function of American economic policy. ...Whether or not the border is open or closed...whether or not the Border Patrol is very stringent in picking up wetbacks or whether it is very liberal in picking them up depends upon the condition of production in the United States."

### The Judicial Process

It is charged that Mexican Americans are totally excluded or are represented in only token numbers on juries throughout the Southwest. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in the

Hernandez case that the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment extends to "any identifiable group in the community which may be the subject of prejudice," and that the Mexican Americans constitute such a group. In the case in point, no Mexican American had been summoned for jury duty in 25 years although the area had a substantial Spanish-speaking population.

In Texas, it is the practice for jury commissioners to ask persons prominent in the community to suggest names for the jury panels. Under this "key man" system, it is alleged, very few Mexican Americans are suggested. In Nueces County, Texas, a Mexican American told the Texas Advisory Committee: "They had 288 grand jurors selected and only 16 Latin Americans over a period of nine years. ...Our people had rather plead guilty than go to a jury system like that."

Atascosa County, Texas, is 45 percent Mexican American. For the week beginning August 11, 1966, the names of 48 persons were on the petit jury panel; two were Mexican American, of whom one was alive.

All of the Southwestern States except New Mexico require that a juror be able to speak and understand English (except that in Texas a court may waive the requirement if English-speaking jurors cannot be found). The requirement has not been tested in the courts.

Arizona, California, and Colorado require that court proceedings be carried on in English; New Mexico and Texas have no such requirement. All States allow for the use of interpreters, but it appears that the language barrier that colors many Mexican Americans' attitudes toward the courts may affect not only their ability to defend themselves but also their motivation to do so. One Mexican American, describing a friend who pleaded guilty to a charge "just to avoid the fuss" said, "I wonder how many thousands of Mexicans this has happened to in the State of California that want to get it over with and be guilty because of the language problem."

Many Mexican Americans believe that if they are brought into court and found guilty of a crime or misdemeanor they are likely to receive a more severe sentence than an Anglo. There has been testimony that much harsher sentences have been meted out to Mexican Americans in towns where Anglos who committed similar crimes were treated lightly. And an Anglo scholar who studied the court records of a small town in California said that they "reveal the the punishments meted out to Anglos were significantly less severe than that given to Mexican Americans convicted on the same charges. Anglos, for example, are fined for drunkenness and sometimes kept in jail overnight. Mexicans have been fined and jailed for up to 60 days, though their conduct while drunk was

essentially the same as that of the Anglos." Similar complaints are voiced concerning the handling of juveniles.

### Voting

In some areas Mexican Americans have testified that their right to vote has been compromised by means ranging from outright intimidation to restrictive laws which make registration difficult.

Only Arizona and California require that a voter be literate in English. In Texas, however, a new registration law enacted in 1966 has been described by some Mexican Americans as actually constituting a substitute for the poll tax, which was repealed at the same time. After studying the registration act, the Texas State Advisory Committee to this Commission requested that the Commission in consultation with the Department of Justice review the law to determine if it "violates the civil rights of citizens or if it presents a serious obstacle to increased registration."

Mexican Americans have described other kinds of registration difficulties. It was claimed in 1967 that local officials in two Northern California counties refused to give registration books to Mexican American volunteer deputy registrars.

In a Texas town, Mexican Americans described a variety of attempts to lower the Mexican American turnout. They alleged that welfare recipients were intimidated, that police ticketed cars for minor defects on election day, and that election officials attempted to confuse Mexican American voters by asking "Where is your property?" instead of "Where do you live?" thus making some eligible voters believe they must own property in order to vote.

### Access to Justice

There has been no concerted legal attack on the civil rights problems of Mexican Americans. Very few suits have been brought against the police in cases of alleged brutality. While more than a dozen cases involving exclusion of Negroes from juries have reached the Supreme Court, only one such involving Mexican Americans has gone to the Court. Only a handful of cases have been brought under Federal and State law prohibiting discrimination in employment, only a handful in cases of school or classroom segregation.

Until very recently, there has been no Mexican American organization with the funds or legal expertise necessary to mount a systematic legal attack on various civil rights disabilities. Individual Mexican Americans who have been,

or think they have been, discriminated against (and often they are ignorant of their rights) usually lack the money necessary to hire a lawyer and prosecute a case. Often they appear to lack the will as well. A Mexican American member of the Texas Advisory Committee explained why some are reluctant to use administrative and legal processes:

"In general the low income people, the low education people, are afraid of anybody coming at them with a piece of paper. Either it's a bill collector or the law. And it's not that they know the law that well--it's the lack of knowledge that the law is there to protect them. They have been abused so long that they just are afraid of everybody."

As of 1960, only 2 percent of lawyers in the Southwest had Spanish surnames. Most of them have a large volume of cases and low incomes which make it impossible for them to donate the time necessary for difficult civil rights cases. Very few have experience in civil rights litigation, which is so complex that it is now recognized as a specialty within the law.

In May 1968, the Ford Foundation announced the establishment of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. A small legal staff based in San Antonio will work with local lawyers throughout the Southwest in identifying and preparing civil rights cases for litigation. The Fund

will also carry on an educational program designed to inform Mexican Americans of their civil rights.

## EDUCATION

Taking the Southwest as a whole, Mexican Americans on the average have about eight years of schooling, or four years less than Anglos, two years less than nonwhites. Educational statistics must be scrutinized closely, however, by State and county and city. In Texas, for example, 40 percent of all Mexican Americans are functionally illiterate.

Obviously the dropout rate among Mexican Americans is very high, with most of the dropouts occurring by eighth or ninth grade. High dropout rates at the high school level then come as no particular surprise, and they appear more ominous when they occur in urban settings where occupations require relatively high levels of skill and education. In 1966, two predominantly Mexican American high schools in Los Angeles had dropout rates of 53.8 percent and 47.5 percent.

Nor is it surprising that Mexican American enrollments in college are low. About two percent of California's college population, for example, is of Spanish surname.

Apart from statistics about educational level and dropouts, far too little sound information is available about the education of Mexican American children in the Southwest. Except for California, statewide figures showing the amount of school segregation are not available. Too little is known about the sporadic educational experiences of the 40,000

to 50,000 migrant children. The degree to which the facilities, teachers, and educational programs of predominantly Mexican American schools are not equal to those of Anglo schools has not been established.

Although there is little of what academicians would regard as "hard" evidence, there is a wealth of impressionistic, anecdotal, and eyewitness accounts of what goes on in the schools. And the mere statistics themselves, of course, suggest a few reasonable inferences.

Mexican Americans make many specific complaints: crowdedand run-down facilities, large class size, poor counseling and guidance, poor vocational education, testing and tracking practices that isolate Mexican Americans within schools if they are not in segregated schools, inappropriate textbooks and other teaching materials. It is clear, however, that there is also a more general and overriding concern: that the schools function as mirrors of some of the more destructive attitudes of the dominant society.

"It's the way the schools feel, the attitudes of the schools toward the Mexican American," a parent said in Los Angeles in 1967. In fact, grievances about education have provided the impetus for community and parental action and organization. The groups thus formed, however,

greatly need technical advice and educational programs of their own.

Mexican American parents are, of course, not alone in challenging some of the prevailing attitudes. In 1967, a Colorado State Government report on Spanish-surnamed citizens found that it is the prevailing opinion among many school administrators that Mexican American youth "because of their cultural value system...do not aspire to educational success." But, the report asserted:

> "The lack of aspiration in any Spanish-surnamed student is probably not his failure to accept prevailing cultural goals, but his awareness that he cannot make it. Assuming he has the ability, as do many Spanish-surnamed students who drop out of school, it is the educational system and the majority society which kill his aspiration, not an inner deficiency."

English must be used as the language of classroom instruction except in New Mexico and California, and California repealed its "English only" law just last year. Until recently, the practice has been widespread (and some assert that it still is today) to prohibit resolutely the speaking of Spanish even on the playground. A Mexican American leader in Phoenix deplored the "bigoted approach on the part of the schools which immediately puts in the child's mind that the Spanish language is inferior--not socially acceptable--since you cannot use it in public."

In 1964, a group of seventh grade students in Texas was asked to write essays about their experience in elementary school. They described some of the methods used to punish them for speaking Spanish: having to stand on the "black square" for an hour or so; being charged a penny for each Spanish word uttered; and having to write three pages of "I must not speak Spanish in school."

Educators' reasons for prohibiting the use of Spanish are, of course, that the children must learn English. But some of the essays showed that suppression of Spanish did not necessarily insure success in the teaching of English.

One girl wrote:

> "I have fell in the for grade. Some of the rules were. No talking in class. No getting up from there chairs. And no speaking spanish. If any baby that speaking spanish would get a leeking, are would be speted from school. P.S. They would get 3 leeking a day."

In integrated schools, it is reported that Mexican American children are sometimes separated from their Anglo classmates in the classroom, on the playground, and in extracurricular affairs. In a rural California district, Mexican American students are always seated behind Anglos at graduation ceremonies. "It makes for a better looking stage," the school principal explained.

Numerous academic and social practices are such as to impress Mexican American students with the idea that

they are not only different but inferior. One teacher explained why she always calls on Anglo children to "help" Mexican American children when they hesitate for an answer: "I think it is better if the Mexican pupils get 'help' from an American pupil who knows what he is talking about than from another Mexican who doesn't. Besides, it is good educational practice to have the American children help the Mexicans. It draws them out and gives them a feeling of importance."

The curriculum in general and textbooks in particular neglect to inform both Anglo and Mexican American pupils of the substantial contributions to the Southwest made by Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and of the rich history and culture of Spanish-speaking people. Denied full status as Americans ("They're told they're Americans and yet they're treated as Mexicans," a school counselor in Los Angeles said), the Mexican American students are also deprived of the chance to gain understanding and pride in their heritage. A Los Angeles high school student said recently:

> "The teachers' negative opinion of Mexico would not bother me so much, except that this is the only image portrayed to us here in America of what we are. We look around for something to be proud of, we question our parents, but all they tell us, 'just be proud you are a Mexican,' because they are too busy working or taking care of the little kids or too uneducated to tell us all we have to be

> proud of...all the thousand things we have to be proud of. And since they cannot tell us these things, and the schools will not, we begin to think that maybe the Anglo teacher is right, that maybe we are inferior, that we do not belong in his world, that, as some teachers actually tell students to their faces, we should go back to Mexico and quit causing problems for America."

The crisis in identity is obviously acute for many Mexican American youngsters. A Mexican American teacher in a Los Angeles school noted differences in behavior between native-born Mexican Americans and Mexican-born students at a Cinco de Mayo assembly: "The Mexican youngster knew who he was and had no difficulty, while the Mexican American youngster was very much ashamed, very insecure."

In some cases, school personnel display an insensitivity which borders on brutality. In 1967, a Los Angeles mother testified before the State Advisory Committee to the Commission:

> "We have another mother in the school in the San Fernando Valley, which is having nine children, and which, with the wages the husband make, was not enough to put an adequate lunch for the children when they went to school. Yet the school kept constantly calling her back telling her that the beans--a sandwich of beans--was not enough. I think she knew that. She knew that very well. The point was, she didn't have enough money to put anything better.
>
> And that is not the problem I'm referring about. The problem is that this was told to the children in front of the rest of

> the class. What kind of teacher would make the children feel bad because of that--not once, three, four, five times. When a teacher is doing this, this is making damage on the child itself. He can no longer concentrate on trying to improve, trying to do his best. He's already been branded."

Mexican American educators, parents, and students, and also many Anglos, are demanding that textbooks and other teaching materials be revised so as to give a proper representation of Mexican history and culture, and that teachers, administrators, and guidance and counseling personnel be properly trained in the same subjects as well as in appropriate ways to deal with Mexican American students. Little has been done so far, however. At El Paso, a Mexican American educator referred to an NDEA Institute he directed for teachers on the role of Negroes and Mexican Americans in American history. "It was unique for two years in a row," he said, "while scores of others dealt with such vital questions as new insights on the French and Indian wars or the adjustment to industrialism in the Western world."

### Isolation by School or by Class

Although adequate statistics are not available about the extent of school segregation as a whole, a look at the schools suggests that it is widespread. On the west side of San Antonio there are three elementary schools within walking

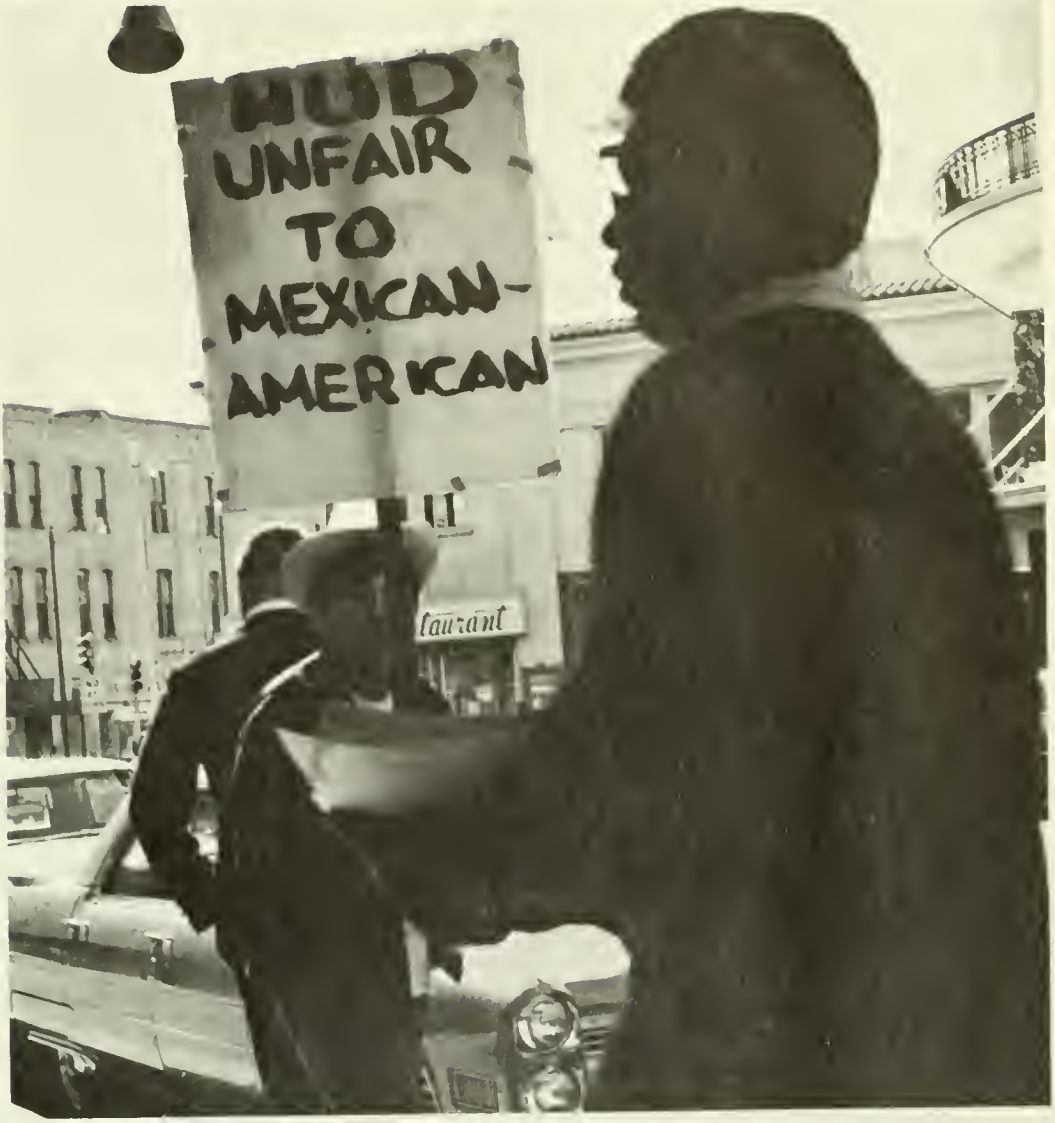
distance of each other. Their names--Sojourner Truth, Hidalgo, and Will Rogers--accurately reflect the ethnic compositions of their student bodies.

California has released an ethnic breakdown of its schools, which shows that 57 percent of Mexican American students in the eight largest school districts attend schools that are segregated according to California's definition: the ethnic composition of the student body is not within 15 percent of the composition of the school district. Only 2.25 percent of California's teachers have Spanish surnames.

Testing, "ability" grouping, and counseling practices often result in Mexican American segregation within "integrated" schools. There is serious question in many educators' minds about the reliability of "intelligence" tests, yet in California, Mexican Americans comprise more than a quarter of the children assigned to classes for the mentally retarded.

"Why is it that in our Head Start program we found out the when you gave tests in Spanish the children's I.Q. increased, and yet when the school tested them, their mental capacities were much lower?," a Mexican American community leader demanded.

The charge is frequently made that counselors guide Mexican American students into "realistic" vocational and business programs rather than a curriculum that might prepare them for more education. A recent study in Los Angeles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showed that only a fifth of Mexican American students are in an academic program while half the Anglo children are.

### Language

The schools' attitudes toward the Spanish language obviously play a role in strengthening or shaking a child's self-esteem. In addition, there are, of course, serious educational problems involved in teaching children whose first language is not English. The traditional approach of the schools has not solved these problems.

"As the Spanish-speaking child has seldom mastered the basic grammatical concepts of the Spanish language before he is forced to deal with English, he seldom learns either Spanish or English well," a Mexican American educator said recently. "The school districts of the Southwest have the unique honor of graduating students who are functionally illiterate in two languages." State and national educational organizations have recently been taking a much greater interest in the problems of Mexican American education, and some Anglo teachers have made special efforts to learn Spanish and to understand the cultural background of their pupils.

There is now great pressure from the Mexican American community for bilingual teaching programs which would enable children to learn English as a second language while taking basic subjects in Spanish. Some promisive experimentation

with bilingual programs is now going on, and more will be supported if funding is provided. The fact that much research must still be done, and teaching materials developed, is an indication of the lack of interest the region's universities have shown in the educational needs of the area's largest minority group. This lack of attention also has been reflected at the national level. A Mexican American educator recently pointed out: "Odd as it may seem, the United States Government has done more to help citizens of other countries learn English in their own lands than it has done for non-English-speaking American citizens in this country. We know that there are texts and tapes and teacher training programs available through the State Department for overseas use. Why can't these materials be made available to our teachers and students of English?"

### Migrant Education

Children whose parents are migratory workers suffer more severe educational deprivation than any others. They are moved from school to school, few of which welcome them, and it is alleged that some schools will not admit migrant children or, if they do, put them in segregated classes under the instruction of substitute or non-credentialed teachers. It is reported that school attendance laws are seldom enforced in the case of the migrant children.

Some Federal and State funds have been provided for special assistance in migrant education; in California, such funds provide services, directly or indirectly, to only about one of every eight migrant children in the State.

Since 1963, Texas has tried to improve the education of migrants by establishing an intensive six-month program for children who leave the area early in the spring and return late in the fall. The program emphasizes intensive training in language development. Critics, however, have attacked it as being naive as well as segregationist.

### Pressures for Change

Mexican American groups, with support from an increasing number of Anglo educators, are pressing for a great variety of changes in the schools. They ask for more research on bilingual, bicultural education, improved and more relevant training for the teachers who will instruct Mexican American students, and the development of new teaching materials. They urge the recruitment of more Spanish-speaking teachers, and suggest that certification requirements should be revised. They ask that existing ability tests be reviewed for cultural bias, and that vocational education programs be evaluated and brought up to date. And they insist that the Mexican American parents and community must be more closely involved in the education of the youth. They allege that the "Upward

Bound" program for recruiting and helping minority or poor youngsters into college has not been effective in reaching many Mexican Americans and urge much greater scholarship assistance from private foundations.

## EMPLOYMENT

As a group, Mexican Americans have been unable to move into the mainstream of American economic life. Taking the Southwest as a whole, their unemployment rate is about double that of Anglos. As is so often the case, overall statistics tell less than the whole story. They understate the case for Mexican Americans because, among other things, unemployed farm workers are not included in unemployment statistics. Furthermore, regional figures hide the severity of the situation as it exists in many barrios where Mexican Americans are concentrated. The unemployment level hovers at about 20 percent in one Denver ward, 12 percent in a Los Angeles census tract.

More important, perhaps, than the gross unemployment picture are other characteristic patterns:

--There is widespread underemployment. Many Mexican Americans do not have full-time, year-round jobs. A 1966 survey by the Department of Labor showed that 47 percent of the men in a Mexican American district of San Antonio were either unemployed, underemployed, or earning less than $60 per week.

--Mexican Americans are heavily concentrated in the lowest paying jobs. This condition holds for public employment--Federal, State, county, and city--as well as private. In 1960, 79 percent of all Mexican American workers labored in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. This statistic makes it evident that Mexican Americans have difficulty gaining promotion once they are employed, probably due in part to the generally low level of education and skills, and probably in part to discrimination.

--There are certain important kinds of business and industry in which Mexican Americans appear not to have made significant inroads at any level. In Los Angeles County, they have been well represented, since World War II, in the food, steel, automobile assembly, and diecast aluminum industries. But it is alleged that in others which include some of the most important growth industries and companies--aircraft, telephone, space, and electronic and allied industries--Mexican American employees total 5 percent or less, though they constitute from 12 to 14 percent of the County population as a whole.

The single largest, and the best-paying, employer in the Southwest is the United States Government. As of mid-1966, having made dramatic increases in a short time, it employed Mexican Americans in almost direct proportion to their percentage of the total labor force--about 10 percent--taking the Southwest as a whole.

Again, however, overall statistics do not present a complete picture, for in California, which has the largest concentration of Mexican Americans of all the Southwestern states, Mexican American Federal employees were only 4.9 percent. And in Los Angeles County, which has the largest concentration of Mexican Americans in the country, they were only about 4 percent. In that county, the Post Office employs 43 percent of all Federal employees, but only 4.1 percent of those employees are Mexican American.

Resentment against Post Office hiring and promotion policies runs high among Mexican Americans in California, both because the Post Office is such a large employer and because it has made special efforts to help another minority group.

"It is a fact that last year in San Francisco," a Mexican American testified before the California State Advisory Committee to this Commission, "after the Negro uprising, 700 positions were created to pacify and alleviate

the problems of unemployment in the Negro community. The Civil Service exams were waived in the mentioned case. Yet, when the Mexican American organizations requested that the same be done for the Mexican American, the Administration refused to acknowledge that the Mexican American community was faced with the same problem in employment. Will we have to burn some buildings to obtain justice from our Government?"

As is true in the private sector of the economy, Mexican Americans in Federal service are clustered in the lowest pay scales. In the postal service, 91 percent are in the lowest paying positions, grades one through four. Overall, nearly 70 percent are at entry level.

Employment of Mexican Americans by State, county, and city governments varies but in general is less than Federal. In California, only about 4 percent of the State employees are Mexican American, and that percentage represents a sharp increase over what it was just a few years ago.

A study recently conducted by the Commission showed that in Houston and the San Francisco Bay area, persons of Spanish surname held 7.7 percent and 2.4 percent of municipal jobs, respectively. They constitute 6.4 percent of the total population in both places.

In some important cases, it is difficult to obtain figures. The city of Los Angeles, for example, home for

260,389 Mexican Americans at the time of the 1960 census, insists that it makes no ethnic head count and that it cannot even estimate the number of city employees who are of Mexican descent. The city does, however, now keep an ethnic count of appointments made in any given year; in 1965-66, they were running about 6 percent Mexican American.

### Private Employment

It is difficult to obtain precise ethnic breakdowns for private businesses and industries. Those available, however, suggest that there are wide variations in the employment pattern, but that Mexican Americans are greatly underrepresented in certain kinds of employment in many Southwestern towns. In Mathis, Texas, where 65 percent of the population is of Spanish surname, the only bank had no Spanish-speaking employee in 1966, nor did the power and light company. There were no Mexican American journeymen or masters in skilled trades. In Roswell, New Mexico, which is 14.2 percent Mexican American, neither the telephone company nor the public utility company had any Mexican American employees at any level in 1964.

Mexican American spokesmen claim that many large employers have poor records in hiring and promoting Mexican Americans. In 1966, an official of a large oil company

testified before the Texas Advisory Committee of the Commission on Civil Rights:

"In the counties of Kleberg, Nueces, and San Patricio we have 883 employees. Of Latin American and Negroes there are 8, which is a percentage of 1. ...I might say that we are an equal rights company, the Humble Oil and Refining Company."

Mexican Americans constitute 40 percent of the population of the three counties.

### Discrimination and Other Causes

Discrimination against Mexican Americans is often difficult to prove because employers may cite lack of skill or facility in the English language as grounds for refusing employment or promotion. And it is unquestionably true that much of the Mexican American employment situation in general must be laid to the low educational level and lack of occupational skills on the part of many members of the community. Nonetheless, the Anglo and Mexican American observers are convinced that overt discrimination is widespread.

In 1967, the director of the Los Angeles office of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission testified before the State Advisory Committee of the Commission on Civil Rights that "our experience has been, and certainly is

still, there is much too much discrimination against Mexican Americans."

He went on to say: "I am reminded of an employer in Arizona who said to us, 'Yes, we discriminate against Mexican Americans. We always have. We have never permitted Mexican Americans to get higher than a certain level in this company.'

"I am also reminded of the union representative who said he believes the best way to integrate his union is to hire a Negro to work with his own people.

"We have had at least one employer who has used the techniques of not hiring anyone on any given day when Negroes and Mexican Americans are the best qualified, but hiring on days when these people did not appear as applicants."

Charges of discrimination, particularly in promotion, have been brought by Mexican American organizations against Federal installations as well as private companies, many of which hold Government contracts which prohibit discrimination. The Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio has been a frequent target; so have other military installations. Charges of differential pay and treatment have been made against the Kingsville Naval Air Station. It was alleged that Mexican American Navy Exchange employees are paid 80 cents an hour and Anglos $1.25, and that the Navy has contracts with a cleaner who hires Spanish-speaking employees at 50 cents

an hour. A Mexican American supervisor charged that he was ordered to sweep and clean his area while no Anglos of the same (or even lower) rank have been asked to perform such duties.

Mexican Americans complain that, although they must be paid good wages (though often they are not), they cannot rise into higher positions. One in Los Angeles testified that when he was the logical choice to become foreman, his employer (who acknowledged the man's ability) told him:

> "John, the men won't take orders from you."
>
> "I said, 'What men?'"
>
> "He said, 'The American men.'"
>
> "So, being from Afghanistan, I figured that's right. So I was given a raise of 25 cents an hour and I was happy with that."

Many observers believe that private firms, and Civil Service itself, often establish totally irrelevant requirements which have the effect, intended or not, of screening out Mexican American applicants. A high school diploma is often necessary to gain very simple sorts of jobs.

"This high school fetish that is still adhered to by some employers is harmful to the dropout and is also harmful to the industry itself," the Anglo manager of training for an aircraft company in Los Angeles told the California State Advisory Committee of the Commission on Civil Rights in 1967.

"A few years ago Douglas and Lockheed collaborated in a study of minimum requirements for factory occupations. We found that 18 jobs could be performed by people with less than eighth grade education, 11 jobs with eighth grade ability level, and 27 jobs with tenth grade ability level."

Tests of various kinds often present unnecessary obstacles to employment for Mexican Americans. It is acknowledged that tests seldom accurately measure the ability of different language or cultural groups. And in some cases, it is difficult to see what relationship a given test has to a given job. In 1967, the San Francisco Chronicle reported that several of the best gardeners in the city's Recreations and Parks Department had lost their jobs because, having been hired on a temporary basis until they could meet Civil Service requirements, they could not pass a written test which a reporter described as a "watered-down version of a college entrance exam." It included such questions as "He treated me as though I _____ a stranger."

The dismissed gardeners were described by a superior as men who "can spot plant diseases and know just what to do, but put it down in writing--never!"

### Employment of Non-resident "Residents"

There is an additional factor--a crucial one--which affects the employment and wage possibilities of the many

Mexican Americans living along the great border which stretches from Brownsville, Texas to San Diego, California. Each day, at least 44,000 Mexican citizens and about 18,000 American citizens commute to jobs in the American border towns from their homes in Mexico.

These commuters, whose wages are high by Mexican standards but would not provide a bare subsistence in the United States, are admitted each day under what Judge Luther Youngdahl of the Federal District Court in Washington has termed "an amiable fiction": that they are bona fide immigrants to the United States. The American Government grants them the immigration documents from which they derive the designation "Green Carders" despite the fact that there is no proof that they intend ever to establish residence in this country and, in fact, every evidence that they do not.

There have been many allegations that commuters have been used as strikebreakers in labor disputes in the United States. And there is substantial evidence that their daily migration depresses wages and creates unemployment for Mexican Americans who live along the border.

In 1966, unemployment in Texas border towns was almost 95 percent higher than in the interior. Wages in the same towns were 31 percent below the State average. On one day in 1966, 2,581 Green Carders crossed into Laredo where 3,365

American citizens were unemployed and where the local unemployment rate was 12.6 percent. In El Paso, 11,772 crossed on a day when 5,050 were unemployed. In California's Imperial Valley, where some 7,500 commuters work, the unemployment rate in 1966 was twice the State average.

It appears unlikely that many of the commuters possess skills which are not available on the American side of the border. When a spot survey was made in 1961, for example, two garment manufacturing firms in Laredo were employing 88 Green Carders as sewing machine operators at the same time that applications from 156 out-of-work American sewing machine operators were on file at the Texas Employment Commission office in Laredo.

The U.S. Attorney General is required by law to refuse entry to commuters if domestic workers are available. The evidence suggests that this law is not enforced.

Under immigration law, the commuter is officially a "resident alien". There is no authority in the law for a resident to be non-resident.

Despite the damaging effect of the commuters on the domestic job situation and wage structure, Mexican American spokesmen and organizations appear to have ambivalent feelings about how or whether to attack the problem. Although all deplore the use of Green Carders as strikebreakers, there have been few concerted efforts to get the border closed.

Reluctance to press for this solution may spring from the fear that the already increasing tendency for the border to develop as a "Hong Kong economy" will be spurred. Already "runaway industries" are establishing plants just inside the Mexican border, with the encouragement of the Mexican government which allows the plants to import machinery, raw goods, and semi-finished goods duty-free, and to export the finished products freely. Moreover, a Mexican American labor official pointed out, "when these products are shipped into the U.S., Section 807 of the Tariff Code provides a special, very low tariff--not on the value of the products, but on the cost of the value added in the Mexican plant, which is essentially the low wages of the Mexican workers."

### Agricultural Labor

While it cannot be stressed too strongly that the Mexican American problems of today are primarily urban problems, the condition of the dwindling number of Mexican American workers in agriculture deserves special mention.

As of 1960, 16 percent of all Mexican American employment was in agriculture. Today, perhaps 250,000 Mexican Americans subsist entirely or primarily by farm labor. Mexican Americans from Texas dominate the migrant labor force which fans out across the Midwest, the Rocky Mountain States, and up the Pacific Coast. Resident Mexican Americans,

many of them former migrants who settled down, comprise most of the farm labor force of California, Arizona, and Colorado.

Wages for farm labor are low, employment is seasonal and often irregular even during the season, the work is backbreaking without offering the opportunity for advancement, and living and working conditions are often indescribably bad.

In January of 1967, farm labor wages ranged from $1.09 an hour in New Mexico to $1.62 in California. The annual income for farm workers in 1964 averaged $1,213, with migrants earning less than $1,000 on the average.

Women and children form an important portion of the farm labor force. "A mother cannot work, yet she must work," a woman in California said, and the low prevailing wage makes clear why. For the families who follow the crops, education is interrupted, health and welfare programs are often inaccessible owing to residence requirements and for other reasons, and the miserable housing is notorious. A health official in Indiana testified before the Indiana State Advisory Committee to this Commission that inspections of 329 labor camps in the State found only four which were certifiable by State standards. (None of them was closed however, and the Department of Labor continued interstate recruitment of migrant workers although it is required not to do so when housing does not meet State requirements.)

New Mexico and Texas have no provisions or requirements covering migrant housing. A Mexican American in Colorado described migrant housing this way: "On various places, they just run out the chickens and the migratory worker moves in. When he moves out the chickens move back in." An Anglo professor doesn't think the chickens are so well-off either; he says he saw labor camps in 1967 "that aren't fit for animals."

Threatened by competition from Mexican immigrants even more desperate than they, the Mexican American farm workers find little protection from American law. Farm labor is specifically excluded from the right to bargain under the National Labor Relations Act, and it is limited in its coverage under Social Security and minimum wage laws. State laws vary but none provides unemployment insurance, and even so basic a protection as workmen's compensation for injury suffered on the job is limited.

Enforcement of such regulations as do exist to protect the farm worker is spotty.

## PUBLIC POLICIES AND PUBLIC AGENCIES

In testimony before the Commission and various of its State Advisory Committees, at a Cabinet-level hearing in El Paso in October of 1967, and in numerous speeches and protests, Mexican Americans have made clear their community's growing frustration and anger. The condition of the large proportion of the community, they say, signifies the failure of public policies and public agencies to provide equal access to the institutions, services, and programs of American society.

The failures they cite are of several different, though often overlapping, kinds. The first is one common to all societies: priorities and the allocation of resources tend to favor the haves rather than, and sometimes at the direct expense of, the have-nots. Second, even where legislated or administrative policies or standards might protect the poor, it is charged that public agencies sometimes, because of the influence of powerful private interests, sometimes withhold services, apply the policies wrongly or differentially, and enforce the standards sporadically or not at all. In many cases it is acknowledged that agencies lack the funds and personnel necessary for implementation, but this, again, it is said, represents a system of priorities. Finally, even when programs are specifically

designed and sincerely meant to benefit poor people, they are often ineffective either for reasons which are generic to bureaucracies or because of the inability of bureaucrats to make the programs accessible or useful to the Mexican American community.

Many Mexican Americans are extremely distrustful of the intentions as well as the practices of Federal as well as State and local agencies. At El Paso, one said:

> "We who have for thirty years seen the Department of Labor stand by, and at times connive, while farm labor unions were destroyed by agri-business; we who have seen the Immigration and Naturalization Service see-saw with the seasonal tides of wetbacks; we who are now seeing the Department of Housing and Urban Development assist in the demolishment of the urban barrios where ex-farm laborers have sought a final refuge; we who have waited for a Secretary of Education who would bristle with indignation, back it with action, at a system that continues to produce that shameful anacronism--the migrant child; we who have seen the Office of Economic Opportunity retreat with its shield, not on it, after calling the Mexican poor to do battle for maximum feasible participation in their own destinies. ...We, may I say, are profoundly skeptical."

Mexican Americans are well aware of the public subsidies that increase the advantages of those who are already well off. The President's Commission on Rural Poverty reported that Federal programs to help rural Americans are "woefully out of date" and charged that some of them "have helped to create wealthy landowners while largely bypassing the rural poor."

Mexican Americans are also keenly aware of the fact that the mechanization of agriculture, which has driven many from farm to barrio without skill or training, has been accomplished through generous public subsidy. An economist declared at El Paso:

"The research that has made possible the chemical, physical, and genetic progress that underlies mechanization is subsidized research. The University of California campus at Davis has been for decades the public supported Academy of Science of agri-business." He went on to refer to another kind of subsidy:

"The gigantic irrigation projects by which corporate farming takes water at bargain rates, [are] capitalizing this unearned dividend into rapidly rising land values that place it out of the reach of the small grower. The corporate farms can tap this no-cost benediction by laying a siphon onto the nearest concrete ditch or sinking a $75,000 well. Their promised land is not over Jordan; it is just over the Central Valley Canal. Verily, the Federal Government has laid a water-table for them in the presence of their critics."

A Mexican American union official said at El Paso: "The loud hue and cry being raised today about the curtailment of bracero importation is coming from those who seek to perpetuate this rotten system. The agricultural industry, already heavily subsidized with taxpayer money, wants the

additional advantage of having its dirty labor performed at starvation wages and at conditions that no decent person should be forced to endure."

At a San Francisco hearing in 1967, a Mexican American said that the Department of Labor tells "statistical lies" in order to accommodate growers wishing a supply of braceros from Mexico. Still on the subject of labor, it was said at El Paso:

"The employment of Mexican citizens who have entered this country illegally has become a regular feature of the agricultural labor market. This illegal supply of labor rests on the willingness of corporate farmers to hire, of intermediaries to transport, of Congress to tolerate, and of the Department of Justice to accommodate to this vicious black market in human toil."

An Anglo scholar charged at El Paso that "the Departments of Interior and of Agriculture have a direct responsibility for heavy land loss among the subsistence Spanish American farmers located along the major river systems of New Mexico. The development of almost every major irrigation and flood control district in the State...drove thousands of Spanish Americans from their lands through their inability to pay the financial charges imposed upon their small farms. The policies of both departments are such that the majority of their programs benefit the larger commercial heavily subsidized Anglo American farmer...."

He added:

> "The harsh refusal of the dominant Anglo American population and Anglo dominated state legislatures to permit the expenditures of state funds for programs to assist Spanish Americans is quite ironic in view of the fact that the Anglo American population is far more subsidized by state and Federal Governments than the Spanish Americans. This statement is supported by an examination of the evidence. The network of superhighways constructed by state and Federal funds somehow always bypass the Spanish American areas suffocated by an inadequate transportation system. Lavish airports seldom utilized by the Spanish Americans mark the Anglo American cities... considerable funds are spent on the natural forests for the Anglo American hunter, fisher, and camper to the neglect of the grazing facilities needed by the small Spanish American village livestock owner."

Testifying before a Congressional subcommittee in 1967, a Mexican American said: "This year in Fresno County, one cotton grower received $2 1/2 million in government subsidies for his cotton crop allotment, while the anti-poverty funds for the entire county totaled only $1 1/2 million. This is another contrast in terms of how government welfare is expended in the State of California..."

Policies of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, as well as those of State and local agencies, have come under sharp attack because they have destroyed Mexican American communities in the name of urban renewal. Barrios in San Antonio, Los Angeles, and San Jose, as well

as many smaller communities, have been demolished, and in San Francisco efforts were made to blueprint 2,700 families and nearly 2,000 single individuals out of the heavily Spanish-speaking Mission District.

"It's easier to attract money for tourist attractions than for housing the poor," a Mexican American community organizer said bitterly, apparently referring to the fact that Mexican Americans in San Antonio were displaced for construction of the Hemisfair and in Los Angeles for the construction of a baseball stadium.

States, counties, and local communities can, and often do, thwart Federal efforts to help the Mexican American poor. Thirty-two of the 44 Texas counties with Mexican American populations of 25 percent or more participate in Federal food (either surplus commodities or food stamps) programs. It is charged that some schools do not take advantage of the program providing free lunches to eligible children even though funds are available to do so. It is charged that some school districts divert into their general fund Federal money earmarked for the education of poor children. And some school districts will not accept such help for their disadvantaged children. A suit has recently been brought against a district in Orange County, California, which has failed to accept more than $1 million to which it is entitled, although it scores lowest of all California

county districts on a statewide reading test. Mexican American enrollment in the schools is 29 percent. The superintendent of a district in Texas which is about 70 percent Mexican American explained that the schools had not accepted Federal funds because, "We feel like we are doing a pretty good job." Median school years completed by Mexican Americans in the county are 2.1.

As for the application or enforcement of existing policies Mexican Americans claim that local sheriffs and police often allow migrant workers to sleep in ditchbanks or cars during the harvest, then roust them as soon as the season ends. They charge that the Farm Placement Service of the Department of Labor recruits workers without assuring itself that wages and working conditions are as advertised and that they meet minimal Federal and State standards (where they exist). And the condition of much farm labor housing is proof that authorities cannot or will not, in any event do not, effectively enforce those State requirements which do exist.

An Anglo professor said at El Paso that wages for labor in sugar beet production are determined on the basis of annual regional hearings which "are dominated by sugar processors and producers." As of 1967, the wage was set at $1.40 per hour, but the Department of Agriculture gives producers the option of paying at that rate or on a piecework basis. "As a practical matter," the professor said, "the

rate paid is the latter" because in most cases it averages out at less than $1.40, in some cases as low as 75 cents an hour. Producers are required to comply with the wage standard in order to receive their annual subsidy from the government.

Spokesmen claim that Federal agencies have not been energetic in promoting equal job opportunities for Mexican Americans, and that some State and local agencies are at best indifferent in doing so. In some cases it appears that lack of staffing and resources inhibits the making of positive efforts to increase Mexican American employment. In some cases it appears also that there is a reluctance to apply available sanctions. As of June 1967, for example, the Office of Federal Contract Compliance of the Defense Contract Administration Services Region, Department of Defense, in Los Angeles had not cancelled a single Federal contract on the grounds of noncompliance with nondiscriminatory requirements. The director of the office acknowledged that he did not know, even roughly, the employment rate of Mexican Americans in the large aircraft industry in the area, and when pressed as to whether the aircraft companies are in compliance with the law said, "Some may be and some may not be."

The Los Angeles staff had only 10 employees, who were responsible for ensuring that 2,000 prime contractors and

an unknown number of primary and secondary subcontractors do not discriminate. Small wonder that the staff has not been able to engage in much positive work with contractors. In cases where it has been able to, however, good results are apparent. Fifty contractors with which the Office had made special efforts now have an average of 13.9 percent Mexican Americans employed; 50 similar companies with which the Office had not worked have only 9.3 percent. Furthermore, the firms which receive special attention had 6.7 percent more skilled Mexican Americans craftsmen than the others. Such results lend credence to the argument of many Mexican Americans that equality of job opportunity must be pursued through affirmative efforts rather than merely adjudicating specific complaints of discrimination.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has been a special target of Mexican American organizations, both because they believed it was not active in attempting to solve Mexican American employment problems and because there was no Mexican American member of the Commission. In 1967, a Mexican American was appointed to the five-member EEOC. The EEOC has put primary emphasis on responding to specific complaints of discrimination, lacking sufficient staff and resources to pursue a substantial program of affirmative action with employers.

"The Spanish American is not prone to complain about discrimination," a Mexican American said, and the experience of the EEOC bears him out. During the first eight months its Los Angeles office was open, for example, it received complaints from 130 Negroes and only 36 Mexican Americans. The Director of the Office said to the State Advisory Committee to the Commission on Civil Rights that "we need to take a look at how to develop new ways of meeting Mexican American needs."

### Bureaucratic Failures

In El Paso, the Mexican American director of a Los Angeles service center said:

"The fact that traditional agencies cannot relate directly with people in poverty pockets, who have withdrawn behind barriers of distrust and suspicion, has been in evidence for a long time."

Even when these agencies make special efforts they often fail, as do some of the programs of the newer agencies specifically created to help the poor. Some examples may suggest some of the reasons why:

> In some areas, many Mexican American children do not take advantage of federally funded free lunch programs to which they are entitled. The children are given different colored tickets to obtain the food, or they must eat it at a different time or in a different place from their classmates. "Many children will go without

lunch rather than be embarrassed in this way," a Mexican American mother says simply. "This is a nutritional problem and an educational problem." It is also an example of institutionalized insensitivity to cultural values.

A psychiatric social worker in California testifies that the Mexican American community cannot take full advantage of the new Community Mental Health Program for two basic reasons: the paucity of bilingual specialists in the field of mental health, and the inability of the community, owing to its generally impoverished status, to subsidize the staffing of such centers even if staff could be found. This is a problem in the field of mental health. It is also an example of how well-intentioned government programs sometimes fail to help the very people they were created for.

A probation official points out that few institutionalized programs for rehabilitating alchololics or narcotic addicts are effective with Mexican Americans, who would be much more likely to respond to treatment in small centers in their own neighborhoods. This is a health problem, and also an example of planners' ignorance of cultural patterns.

The Department of Agriculture administers a loan program for the rural poor. In Texas, which has 140,000 Mexican American families officially classified as poor, only 242 out of 1,928 loans active as of mid-1967 were held by Mexican Americans. This is an economic problem. It is also another example of a governmental program aimed at serving the poor, which, for whatever reasons, is not serving many Mexican American poor.

A University of Colorado professor who spent last summer among sugar beet workers reports that of all the families he met, many of them without food or money, not one had ever heard of the Food Stamp Program. This is a problem of hunger; it is also a communications and information breakdown.

> Officials operating a Head Start program for the children of migrant workers in California were surprised when few appeared for class at 9:00 in the morning. Since 5:00, the children had been in the field with their parents, who had no place to leave them. This is an educational problem, and also an example of bureaucratic ignorance or indifference to the facts of migrant life.
>
> Housing officials in Tulare County, California, agreed to build new public housing for Mexican American farm workers. The planned housing will be too small for their large families and too expensive for their low incomes.
>
> There is a California elementary school with a large Mexican American enrollment which is named Sal Si Puedes. Those who gave the school a Spanish name doubtless meant to acknowledge in a positive way the background of most pupils. But Sal Si Puedes means, "Get out if you can." This represents either ignorance of the Spanish language or a perverse sense of humor.

There are similarities and differences among these examples. Some represent bureaucratic failures, some show insensitivity, some appear to be the result of ignorance. All of them represent institutional failures to deal effectively with individuals or groups of Mexican Americans.

"The problem of our Mexican Americans are unique and plead for a clearer understanding by government agencies," a Mexican American social agency head recently declared.

Manpower training programs, for example, have in general not been effective in reaching and helping Mexican Americans. Until recently, most Federal training programs were not linked to English language problems. Potential trainees

with language problems were passed over for people who could be trained faster and at lower cost.

The Department of Labor, however, has recognized the failure of most training programs to reach the Mexican American unemployed, and has contracted directly with Mexican American organizations for special recruiting, counseling, placement, and information services. Some spokesmen express the wish that other agencies would follow such a policy.

A major reason for institutional ineptness in relation to Mexican Americans is simply that very few Mexican Americans are in positions of influence in government agencies, in private enterprise, and in schools and universities.

"You have a lot of problems and they always go back to a problem being solved for the Mexican by another group, by Anglos, by another minority. That is the main problem I think we have," a Mexican American said recently.

Mexican Americans claim that they are greatly under-represented even in agencies, including the Commission on Civil Rights established specifically to deal with minority problems.

"You find these commissions discussing us but never appointing us," one points out.

While government agencies (as well as private businesses) often say that they have difficulty recruiting Mexican Americans, community spokesmen claim that efforts to do

so are haphazard and sporadic. They add that Mexican Americans frequently must measure up to standards that would never be applied to Anglos or Negroes.

Selective Service boards across the Southwest have slightly less than 6 percent Mexican American membership. Mexican Americans account for nearly 20 percent of the Southwesterners killed in Vietnam.

At El Paso, a Mexican American attorney remarked: "Those agencies that have exercised diligence and sincerity have been rewarded for their work. Our draft boards have not had the same difficulty finding qualified people as have our jury commissioners. In Nueces County over 75 percent of the men killed in Vietnam bear Mexican American names. ...I simply use this illustration to point out that where an agency wants minority group participation, this is accomplished quickly and in full measure--protests, language handicap, lack of training and all else notwithstanding."

## GROWING SENSE OF IDENTITY

The most pervasive force among Mexican Americans today is a growing sense of identity and a quest for unity to achieve equality of opportunity in every phase of life. In cities and towns throughout the Southwest, Mexican Americans are coming together in issue-oriented and action-committed organizations. The effects of these efforts for unity have not been lost on Federal agencies and private organizations.

In May 1967, the President announced the establishment of the Interagency Committee on Mexican American Affairs, consisting of the Secretaries of Agriculture; Labor; Health, Education, and Welfare; and Housing and Urban Development; and the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Vincente T. Ximenes, a member of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, was named to head the Interagency Committee. The Committee's first major activity was to hold two days of hearings in El Paso in October 1967, at which four Cabinet officers and several agency heads listened as Mexican American spokesmen defined in their own terms the character of major problems facing the community in agriculture, employment, health, education, welfare, housing, anti-poverty programs, and economic security.

At the same time that the hearings were underway, Mexican Americans who sought an entirely different kind of

confrontation with the same problems convened in the heart of El Segundo, an El Paso slum district, to hold the Conference of La Raza Unida. La Raza, literally translated "the race", actually connotes the historical and cultural ties uniting all Spanish-speaking peoples. There was one common theme stressed at the conference: the urgent need for unity, greater communication, greater group awareness, the development of political strength, the development of clear definitions of purpose and methods of operation, and the need for coalitions with other minority groups to achieve common goals.

A direct outgrowth of La Raza Unida Conference was the formation of the Southwest Council of La Raza, funded in June 1968 by the Ford Foundation. The Southwest Council will encourage and help finance the formation of community organizations in the barrios of the Southwest to achieve civil rights and equal opportunity. Units have been established in San Antonio, Texas, and Oakland, California.

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, patterned after the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc,, is headquartered in San Antonio and provides legal and financial assistance for civil rights cases involving Mexican Americans. The Fund received a 7-year Ford Foundation grant this year.

The unionizing movement of farm workers which began more than three years ago in a small area of the San Joaquin Valley in California by the United Farm Workers Organizing

Committee, has expanded into a national effort to boycott California fresh table grapes in order to arouse national interest and concern for the plight of the agricultural worker.

In an effort to eradicate the stereotype of a sombrero-wearing, siesta-loving, and shiftless creature into which the Mexican American has been cast by the advertising industry, the Washington, D.C.-based Mexican American Anti-Defamation Committee has been formed to pressure advertising agencies and their clients into rejecting the stereotype and projecting a positive, or at least neutral, image of the chicano on television, billboards, and in the news media.

Recently, Dr. Hector P. Garcia, a physician from Corpus Christi, Texas, and founder of the American GI Forum, was appointed by the President as a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. He is the first person of Spanish surname to serve as a member of the Commission. Several Federal agencies have recently established task forces on Mexican American affairs and assigned liaison officers with major responsibility for Mexican American matters.

The essential force of the Mexican American movement is hardly told by the listing of names of new organizations or new appointees. It really lies in the mounting interest and activism of young chicanos who may be credited with pushing their elders into more active roles in the drive

for human dignity. At the El Paso La Raza Unida Conference, for example, a youth remarked: "If nothing happens from this [conference], you'll have to step aside or we'll walk over you."

In East Los Angeles last spring, Mexican American students staged walkouts in five high schools in protest of conditions there. Protest walkouts also have occurred in Texas; chicano students have demonstrated against college programs in California, and conducted a separate commencement for chicano youth at a California college last June. The trend is toward more active and aggressive assertion of rights.

The level of organization, of awareness, and of identity is constantly rising. The impact of improved communications through an increase in the chicano press, a struggling network of barrio newspapers and magazines, is a significant addition to the effort to develop philosophy and ideology among chicano groups. In fact, every aspect necessary to the development and sustaining of a movement is being activated and, most importantly, obtaining financial stability.

La Raza has become more than a slogan; it has become a way of life for a people who seek to fully realize their personal and group identity and obtain equality of rights and treatment as citizens of the United States.

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